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ABSTRACT

Following receipt in 1971 of a grant to fund ten athletic scholarships, the Greenhill School in Dallas, Texas established a financial aid committee and assigned financial aid a place in the budget. A policy statement was written expressing a commitment to supporting diversity in the student body through financial aid. In 1976 the school adopted an "empty seat" policy to fill out enrollment by offering places to qualified students with financial need. Cooperation with the Dallas Boys Clubs provided contact with disadvantaged students who could be screened for admission. The leasing of some of the school's property on a 99-year basis will assure a source of income that will completely underwrite the school's financial aid policy. Schools should review their financial aid policies, determining whether (1) they have adequate guidelines, (2) the school's policy is clearly communicated, (3) teachers are of varied backgrounds, (4) the faculty is sensitive to cultural diversity, (5) the curriculum allows for cultural differences, and (6) the provision of aid to staff members' children has received adequate review. Equitability in dispensing funds is particularly important and may best be achieved if handled by a single responsible person rather than by a committee. (PGD)

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"The Evolution of a Financial Aid Program at a Selective Independent School in the Southwest"

Speech delivered at the National Association of Independent Schools in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 28 - March 2, 1985

by Stephen Blanchard

Director of Admissions

Greenhill School, Dallas, TX

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!! It is a pleasure and an honor to talk to you this morning on the role of financial aid in a school. I hope my remarks will serve as a guide in both positive ways and negative ways to deal with the evolution of a financial aid program.

The focus of this case study is my own school - Greenhill School. It is a coed, independent day school with students from age three and one half through the twelfth grade. Greenhill was established in 1950 with sixty two students in its first classes. The current enrollment in 1120 students. The school had no financial aid program until 1971. In that year a prominent businessman and Board member was very interested in a quality athletic program. This man had a son who was an excellent athlete. He said he would underwrite the cost of recruiting the top athletes in the area to attend our school. The Board member insisted on

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the finest program that his son, who was in the twelfth grade at the time, could be proud of. Without really thinking about it, the school said "Gee, that's a great idea, we can start a scholarship program" and accepted this immediate financial aid award. So, in effect, we had a "no need" financial aid program right from the start. But we immediately found that this gift of $10,000 was not what it appeared to be. Why? Well, it seems he made no provisions for future funding of these ten students, some of which were in the ninth and tenth grades at the time. Well, you can imagine what happened - the Board of Trustees established a financial aid committee to draw up some guidelines and to raise funds to keep the students we had just accepted virtually on "full freight" at Greenhill.

Thus, the importance of having financial aid, and more importantly, a financial aid policy, really hit us hard in 1971. As a direct result, we established a financial aid committee, and financial aid became a budgetary item in the school's economic planning, with funds being earmarked from endowment and tuition dollars to provide aid for students.

At the same period of time, the school adopted a Statement of Purpose which clearly states the importance of financial aid to the school. This Statement of Purpose is very important, for in my opinion, all school should have a clear statement of purposes. The paragraph that deals with financial aid reads:

"Greenhill consciously recognizes the educational value of a school community that includes a variety of economic, cultural and racial backgrounds. Its financial aid program is designed to facilitate the attainment of this ideal."

Every prospective parent to Greenhill gets this Statement of Purpose.

Phil Foote became Headmaster in 1976 and has really pushed Greenhill to achieve greater access and diversity. When he became Headmaster, we were not at capacity enrollment. Because of this he said to the school -- if we have qualified students who have financial need, and we have empty seats, we will take these students. This "empty seat" policy is one that schools can use to achieve greater diversity in their program if they do not have full enrollment.

The third phase of our school's evolution in financial aid was, and is, to actively recruit students from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. Students would come to us through the normal admissions process - but because of the racial, economic and geographical set up in Dallas -- most affluent whites live in North Dallas, Hispanics, blacks, Asians live south and east in the inner city -- access to independent education involved a trip of from 35 miles for any student from these cultural groups to attend

Greenhill or any other independent school in Dallas.

Greenhill is not comfortable with this arrangement; we do not want our school to be a "hot house" for white students in North Dallas. The Boys Clubs of Dallas entered the picture. They approached the independent schools in North Dallas in 1974 to see if we were interested in working with them in tutoring disadvantaged students from the public housing projects and other economically deprived areas of Dallas - areas in which the Boys Clubs served. Greenhill said "yes" we would be interested in participating. This would give our teachers an opportunity to be "sensitized" to the various cultures in Dallas and also to identify these students who might want to attend Greenhill. That fall, we had one student come from the program. Our minority population was at 3% in 1974 - now, because of our involvement in this project, three additional independent schools are involved. From one student we took in 1974, we now have 26 students enrolled at Greenhill, and our minority enrollment has reached 14%. Transportation has been financed by a local foundation.

In the Admissions Office we now prescreen about 200 disadvantaged students for possible admission to our school in the fall of each year through going to the various Boys Clubs in Dallas.

The message in the Dallas community now is that Greenhill School has financial aid and encourages students to look at us as an educational alternative. This program has been very successful. Our first two graduates this past year are attending Amherst and Macalester colleges. They are doing well.

This brings us up to the present time. Our Board recently reaffirmed its commitment to financial aid and faculty salaries by leasing 14 acres of our campus for 99 years. This means that over the next several years, endowment income will completely underwrite our financial aid policy.

The following questions are "nuts and bolts" thoughts on financial aid:

1. Does your school have financial aid guidelines? If not, it should.

2. Does the admissions officer and/or financial aid officer at your school clearly communicate the philosophy of the school, and through his/her actions promote access and diversity to the school?

3. It is extremely important for the financial aid officer to push for more teachers of color. Does your school have many teachers from diverse backgrounds?

4. How sensitive is your faculty to cultural diversity?

5. Does our curriculum adequately allow for cultural differences?

6. What about financial aid to teachers' children and other "perks" like the free lunch and the proposed new tax law which would in effect make these taxable if approved?

In conclusion, it is extremely important to be equitable in the dispersal of financial aid funds. I personally would argue that a committee cannot do it fairly, as personalities get involved. One person, a financial aid Czar, if you will, along with the Headmaster, should be able to.